

- Let's take a minute and play a game of "fill in the blank". Here is the sentence, you fill in the blank:
- "The Kingdom of God is like \_\_\_\_\_"
- Fill in the blank. Use something that has tremendous value to you or something that brings you great joy.
- Here is my short list: "The kingdom of God is like ....no traffic on the highway.... a NY Jets win.... an afternoon nap.... my wife's lasagna.... a hug from my kids.
- I'm sure each of us can come up with our own meaningful list. So what is the point of this exercise?
- To bring Jesus' teachings alive in our own lives, in our own times. Jesus did this- He taught in parables. Stories and examples that hit home, made it real for the people of His day. The audience of that day was mostly farmers and fisherman: so Jesus spoke of seeds and weeds and fish and crops. He wanted the people to not only listen to His message but to think about it and relate it to their everyday life.
- We see this happening in Chapter 4 of Saint Mark's Gospel as Jesus presents His teaching on the Kingdom of God. Using two parables involving seeds Jesus answers the questions: What is this Kingdom like? What does it mean to be citizens of that kingdom?
- In the first parable Jesus simply speaks about seeds and what they are supposed to do. They grow and produce. Moreover, they grow and produce without our help or our intricate knowledge of germination or photosynthesis.
- In other words, the Kingdom of God will take root — whether in the world, in a community, or in someone's heart, Jesus does not specify. What Jesus does assure is the Kingdom will grow gradually and automatically. It will grow perhaps so subtly that you won't even notice, but the Kingdom of God will grow — it is undeniable and

unstoppable - until at last it produces its intended fruit – peace, justice, love.

- In the second parable, Jesus speaks of the tiniest of seeds – the mustard seed – growing into a huge bush. A bush providing shade, comfort and a home where all the birds can live. Jesus uses this parable to make the point that the Kingdom of God has room for everyone!
- Everyone is important! No one is too small; no one is insignificant.
- Think about this: Jesus initiated the Kingdom of God in an obscure corner of the world, among a little known group of people, at a time in history when global communication was non-existent. But look at the wonders of God’s work through those people. What seemed small and insignificant had tremendous results – World-wide Christianity!
- Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking we are just ordinary: our daily tasks too routine; our jobs a little boring and mundane. We might think our lives are insignificant in the “big scheme of things”. But we should never underestimate what the Lord can and is doing through us.
- To God we are precious, each one of us essential to His Kingdom. Just because what we do may not bring us recognition (let’s face it caring for a family, visiting a sick friend, volunteering at a soup kitchen are stories that never make the news headlines) doesn’t mean it is not important. It is important to God!
- God chose a poor carpenter and a young Jewish girl to be the parents of Jesus. God chose a simple French nun hidden away in a cloistered convent (St. Therese of Liseux) to write a diary, which would teach the world the importance of prayer and simple acts of love. God chose an elderly Albanian nun (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta) to

minister in the streets to the poorest of the poor to show the world how to live out St. Therese's teachings.

- And God chooses you, in this time and place where you are planted, to build His kingdom. No one is too small; no one is insignificant in the kingdom.
- Earlier in Chapter 4 of St. Mark's Gospel we heard Jesus tell a parable to describe the different responses people have towards God's invitation to live as members of his kingdom.
- Some hear God's invitation but don't understand. Maybe their hearts have grown dull, or they have closed their eyes and hearts and minds.
- Some hear God's invitation but can't stand up to the challenges and choices required. Sometimes God asks us to make changes and move out of our comfort zones.
- Some hear the invitation but are distracted by worldly things that compete for our attention (possessions, careers, fame...)
- But some hear the invitation and take the critical step of opening their heart, taking the Lord's teachings and applying them to their lives.
- It is good for us to keep asking ourselves, which one of these is my response?
- Truth be told, most of us are still working this out. Occasionally slipping when fears or outside pressures get the better of us. But it is so important to keep aiming for total acceptance of God's invitation to the kingdom.
- So how do we come to treasure God's kingdom above all things?
- By realizing Jesus' love for us is so deep; realizing the grace He gives us is so life changing; realizing His protection from sin and death so powerful; and by giving thanks each day. Only then will we treasure God's

kingdom and do all we can to be members of that kingdom.

- And being members of that kingdom means living our lives a certain way. Jesus boiled it down to two things: Love God and love each other.
- Throughout the Gospels, we are described as seeds.
- Seeds are planted somewhere. They grow. They flower and bring beauty to the place they are planted. Or they become food and nourishment for others. We are expected to do the same.
- To grow where we are planted; to be that beauty and that nourishment for others by being the presence of Jesus Christ in this world.